

Chapter III

BUNKER HILL AND THE SIEGE OF BOSTON 1775–1776

At Lexington and Concord on 19 April 1775 American resistance to British policies successfully turned from words to arms. The colonists repulsed the British attempt to capture their supplies, drove the redcoats back to Boston, and determined to keep them there.

Early in May a reconnaissance party including Col. Richard Gridley, chief engineer of the Massachusetts forces, surveyed the area surrounding the main American camp at Cambridge. The group recommended constructing several redoubts and breastworks including “a strong redoubt on Bunker Hill,” lying on Charlestown peninsula just north of Boston.¹ Before long some fortifications appeared near Cambridge, but the patriots postponed work at Bunker Hill and Dorchester Heights southwest of Boston until they were better able to man the positions. Gridley was convinced earthworks were required to keep the enemy “from getting into the Country to lay it waste,” but he was “much embarrass’d for want of assistance, as there were but very few that had any knowledge of . . . [engineering].”²

By June about fifteen thousand Americans, the majority of them New Englanders, had assembled around Boston. Hemmed in, the enemy entrenched and delayed further offensive operations. On the 12th of that month General Thomas Gage, the British commander, decided to occupy the unfortified Dorchester Heights. The next day, when they discovered Gage’s plan, the Americans countered with the decision—recommended earlier—to entrench on Bunker Hill, the highest of the three hills on Charlestown peninsula.

At six o’clock on the evening of June 16, colonial forces assembled in Cambridge under orders from the Massachusetts Committee of Safety. Just before the entrenching started, according to one eyewitness, the chief engineer participated in a discussion in which it was decided first to fortify Breed’s Hill, also on Charlestown peninsula but closer to Boston, and then to place a secondary work on Bunker Hill. Gridley objected on grounds that it was useless to “intrench on Charlestown Hill [Breed’s Hill] ’till we had thrown up some works on the north and south ends of Bunker Hill, to cover . . . men in their retreat, if that should happen.”³ But Gridley, over-



THE BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL. *This lithograph was made in 1875, the year of the Bunker Hill centennial.*
Library of Congress

ruled at the scene by Maj. Gen. Israel Putnam, dutifully laid out a redoubt about forty yards square with a six-foot parapet mounted with gun platforms of earth and wood.⁴ Gridley's redoubt, one British officer later declared, "must have been the work of some days; it was very regular, and exceeding strong."⁵ The *Gentlemen's Magazine* of London called the redoubt "well executed" and described it as follows:

In the only side on which it could be attacked were two pieces of cannon. In the two salient angles were two trees, with their branches projecting off the parapet, to prevent an entry being made on the angles. The two flanks ... of the intrenchment were well contrived, as the fire from them crossed within twenty yards of the face of the redoubt.⁶

Although British scouts heard the picks and shovels, it was after four in the morning before they fully realized what the Americans were up to. The enemy began an immediate cannonade and prepared to outflank the American left between Breed's Hill and the Mystic River and then to make a frontal assault on the rebel redoubt.

While the British slowly set their plan in motion, the patriots, under Gridley's direction, erected three fleches and a breastwork on their exposed left flank. A rail fence further secured the path to Bunker Hill along the left flank and the Mystic River. In the early afternoon of the 17th, Sir William Howe, one of four British generals in Boston, landed without opposition on

Charlestown peninsula and after a two-hour delay made a frontal assault on the rail fence and the redoubt.

Holding their fire until the enemy troops were within fifty yards, the colonials managed to turn back the attacks. Minutes later Howe struck again, focusing this time on Gridley's redoubt. But the colonists' musketry was more devastating than before. The British fell back again. A third assault by fresh troops ended in hand-to-hand combat as the enemy stormed into the redoubt and drove the defenders out. Gridley was one of approximately 300 Americans wounded. About 140 Americans died, while British casualties—226 killed and 828 wounded—exceeded those of any other battle in the Revolution.

Despite the outcome, the rebels showed remarkable determination in defending Breed's Hill from behind their hastily erected defenses. Their performance demonstrated General Putnam's belief that "Americans were not afraid of their heads, though very much afraid of their legs; if you cover these, they will fight forever."⁷ The quality of leadership and devastating musketry of the Americans enabled them to hold out as long as they did.

Peter Brown, a company clerk under Col. William Prescott, commander of the redoubt on Breed's Hill, left a vivid, though somewhat inaccurate, account of the fortification and ensuing battle.

1. "ALTHO' WE WERE BUT FEW . . . WE WERE PRESERVED IN A MOST WONDERFUL MANNER"

Peter Brown to his Mother.

June 28, 1775

Frydy the 16th of June we were ordered to Parade at 6 o'clock with one Day's provisions and Blankets ready for a March somewhere, but we did not know where. So we readily and cheerfully obeyd, the whole that was called for, which was these three . . . Reg[imen]ts . . . About 9 o'Clock at night we marched down on to Charlesto[wn] Hill against Cox Hill in Bo[ston] where we entrenched, and made a Fort of about *Ten Rod long and eight wide*,⁸ with a Breast Work of about *8 more*. We worked there undiscovered till about 5 in the Morn and then we saw our Danger being against 8 ships of the Line and all Boston fortified against us.

(The Danger we were in made us think there was Treachery, and that we were brot there to be all slain, and I must and will venture to say that there was Treachery, Oversight or Presumption in the Conduct of our Officers.) And about half after 5 in the Morn, we not having above half the Fort done, they began to fire, I suppose as soon as they had Orders, pretty briskly a few Minutes, and then stopt, and then again to the Number of about 20 or more. They killed one of us, and then they ceased till about 11 o'Clock and then they began pretty brisk again; and that caused some of

our young Country [people] to desert, apprehending the Danger in a clearer manner than the rest, who were more diligent in digging and fortifyg ourselves against them. We began to be almost beat out, being tired by our Labour and having no sleep the night before, but little victuals, no Drink but Rum They fired very warm from Boston and from on board till about 2 o'Clock, when they began to fire from the Ships in ferry Way, and from the Ship that lay in the River against the Neck to stop our Reinforcemts [which] they did in some Measure. One Cannon cut off 3 Men in two on the Neck of Land. (Our Officers sent time after Time after the Cannons from Cambridge in the Mornng and could get but four, the Capt. of which fired but a few times, and then swang his Hat round three Times to the Enemy, then ceased to Fire.) It being about 3 o'clock there was a little Cessation of the Cannons Roaring. Come to look there was a matter of 40 Barges full of Regulars comg over to us: it is supposed there were about 3000 of them and about 700 of us left not deserted, besides 500 Reinforcemt that could not get so nigh to us as to do any good hardly till they saw that we must all be cut off, or some of them, and then they advanced. When our Officers saw that the Regulars would land they ordered the Artill[er]y to go out of the fort and prevent their Landg if possible, from which the Artilly Capt. took his Pieces and went right off home to Cambridge fast as he could, for which he is now confined and we expect will be shot for it. But the Enemy landed and fronted before us and formed themselves in an Oblong Square, so as to surround us [which] they did in part, and After they were well formed they advanced towds us in Order to swallow us up, but they found a choaky Mouthful of us, tho' we could do nothg with our small Arms as yet for Distance, and had *but two Cannon and nary Gunner*. And they from Bo[ston] and from the ships a firg and throwg Bombs keepg us down till they got almost round us. But God in Mercy to us fought our Battle for us, and altho' we were but few and so were suffered to be defeated by them, we were preserved in a most wonderful Manner far beyond Expectation, to Admiration, for out of our Regt there was *about 37 killed, 4 or 5 taken captive*, and about 47 wounded. . . . If we should be called into Action again I hope to have Courage and strength to act my part valiantly in Defence of our Liberties and our Country, trusting in him who hath yet kept me and hath covered my head in the day of Battle, and tho' we have lost 4 out of our Compa[ny] and our Lieutenant's thigh broke and he taken Captive by the cruel Enemies of America, I was not suffered to be toutched altho' I was in the fort till the Regulars came in and I jumped over the Walls, and ran for about half a Mile where Balls flew like Hailstones, and Cannons roared like Thunder. . . .

—Dexter, *Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, pp. 595–96.

After the battle General Howe provided a detailed analysis of the American defenses from the enemy's point of view. Howe wondered at the value of his "victory." Of particular interest is his conclusion that the rebels' strategy—fortifying "every post in our way" and waiting "to be attacked at every one" while their forces were continually augmented from the countryside—would ultimately succeed.

2. "THE SUCCESS IS TOO DEARLY BOUGHT"

William Howe (probably to the British Adjutant General, Edward Harvey).

Camp upon the Heights of Charlestown
June 22 and 24 [1775]

. . . The troops were no sooner ashore than it was instantly perceived the enemy were very strongly posted, the redoubt upon their right being large and full of men with cannon. To the right of the redoubt they had troops in the houses of Charles Town, about 200 yards distant from the redoubt, the intermediate space not occupied, being exposed to the cannon of the Boston side battery.

From the left of the redoubt, they had a line cannon-proof, about 80 yards in length; and from thence to their left, close upon the Mystic River, they had a breast work made with strong railing taken from the fences and stuffed with hay, which effectually secured those behind it from musquetry. This breast work about 300 yards in extent—they had made the whole in the night of the 16th.

As a specimen of our knowledge of service, the centrys on the Boston side had heard the Rebels at work all night without making any other report of it, except mentioning it in conversation in the morning. The first knowledge the General had of it was by hearing one of the ships firing at the workmen, and going to see what occasioned the firing. Their works when we landed were crowded with men, about 500 yards from us.

From the appearance of their situation and numbers, and seeing that they were pouring in all the strength they could collect, I sent to General Gage to desire a reinforcement, which he immediately complied with, the remaining Light Companies and Grenadiers, with the 47th Battalion and 1st of the Marines landing soon after. Our strength being then about 2200 rank and file, with six field pieces, two light 12-pounders and two howitzers, we begun the attack (the troops in two lines, with Pigott upon the left) by a sharp cannonade, the line moving slowly and frequently halting to give time for the artillery to fire.

The Light Companies upon the right were ordered to keep along the beach to attack the left point of the enemy's breast work, which being carried, they were to attack them in flank. The Grenadiers being directed to

attack the enemy's left in front, supported by the 5th and 52d, their orders were executed by the Grenadiers and 2 battalions with a laudable perseverance, but not with the greatest share of discipline, for as soon as the order with which they set forward to the attack with bayonets was checked by a difficulty they met with in getting over some very high fences of strong railing, under a heavy fire, well kept up by the Rebels, they began firing, and by crowding fell into disorder, and in this state the 2d line mixt with them. The Light Infantry at the same time being repulsed, there was a *moment that I never felt before*, but by the gallantry of the officers it was all recovered and the attack carried.

Upon the left, Pigott met with the same obstruction from the fences, and also had the troops in the houses to combat with, before he could proceed to assail the redoubt, or to turn it to his left, but the town being set on fire by order at this critical time by a carcass from the battery on the Boston side, Pigott was relieved from his enemies in that quarter, and at the 2d onset he carried the redoubt in the handsomest manner, tho' it was most obstinately defended to the last. Thirty of the Rebels not having time to get away were killed with bayonets in it. The little man [Pigot] is worthy of Our Master's [George III's] favour.

But I now come to the fatal consequences of this action—92 officers killed and wounded—a most dreadful account. I have lost my aid de camp Sherwin, who was shot thro' the body and died the next day. Our friend Abercrombie is also gone—he had only a flesh wound, but is said to have been in a very bad habit of body. The General's returns will give you the particulars of what I call this unhappy day. I freely confess to you, when I look to the consequences of it, in the loss of so many brave officers, I do it with horror. The success is too dearly bought. Our killed, serjeants and rank and file, about 160; 300 wounded and in hospital, with as many more incapable of present duty. The Rebels left near 100 killed and 30 wounded, but I have this morning learnt from a deserter from them that they had 300 killed and a great number wounded.

We took five pieces of cannon, and their numbers are said to have been near 6000, but I do not suppose they had more than between 4 and 5000 engaged.

The corps remained upon their arms the night of the action, where we are now encamped in a strong situation, with redoubts commanding the isthmus in our front, the enemy being in two corps about one mile and a half distant from us and both well entrenched; the principal body being upon a height called Summer Hill commanding the way from thence to Cambridge; the other called Winter Hill upon the road to Midford (or Mystich) on the side of Roxbury—they are also entrenched and have artillery at all their posts.

Entre nous, I have heard a bird sing that we can do no more this campaign than endeavour to preserve the town of Boston, which it is sup-

posed the Rebels mean to destroy by fire or sword or both-and it is my opinion, with the strength we shall have collected here upon the arrival of the 4 battalions last from Ireland (one of which, with Bailey of the 23d, came in the day before yesterday), that we must not risk the endangering the loss of Boston-tho' should anything offer in our favour, I should hope we may not let pass the opportunity.

The intentions of these wretches are to fortify every post in our way; wait to be attacked at every one, having their rear secure, destroying as many of us as they can before they set out to their next strong situation, and, in this defensive mode (the whole country coming into them upon every action), they must in the end get the better of our small numbers. We can not (as the General tells us) muster more now than 3400 rank and file for duty, including the Marines and the three last regiments from Ireland.

-Fortescue, *Correspondence of King George III*, III, 221-24. Courtesy Curtis Brown Ltd., London.

Both sides improved their positions after Bunker Hill. The American fortifications advanced under Gridley's direction, with considerable assistance from his son and from Lt. Col. Rufus Putnam, Captains Jeduthan Baldwin and Josiah Waters, and Henry Knox.⁹ Shortly after his arrival in



WASHINGTON TAKES COMMAND. *The newly appointed Commander in Chief of the Continental Army is portrayed assuming command at Cambridge, Massachusetts, 3 July 1775.*

Record Group 148, National Archives

Cambridge as Commander in Chief, General George Washington surveyed the progress. He noted that the British were placing strong entrenchments on Bunker Hill and Roxbury Neck, the isthmus linking Boston with the mainland. Their position was enhanced by the presence of stationary and floating batteries which enabled them to bombard the patriots. Washington's troops had entrenched at Roxbury and held a commanding view of the enemy's strongest position, the ground on Charlestown Neck taken from the rebels in June.

In his report to Congress, Washington attested that the Continentals had done the best possible job securing the line, given the handicaps of insufficient men, tools, and engineers. While supporting the decision "to hold and defend these Works, as long as possible," he also recognized what was to become a recurring concern — "the Difficulties which attend the Defence of Lines of so great extent."

3. "WE ARE AS WELL SECURED, AS COULD BE EXPECTED"

George Washington to the President of Congress.

Camp at Cambridge, July 10, 1775

Sir:

I arrived safely at this place on the 3d instant; after a Journey attended with a good deal of Fatigue and retarded by necessary attentions to the successive Civilities which accompanied me in my whole route. Upon my arrival I immediately visited the several Posts occupied by our Troops, and as soon as the Weather permitted, reconnoitred those of the Enemy. I found the latter strongly entrenching on Bunkers Hill about a mile from Charlestown, and advanced about half a mile from the place of the last Action, with their Centries advanced about 150 Yards on this side the narrowest part of the neck leading from this place to Charles Town. Their floating Batteries lay in Mystick River, near their Camp, and a twenty Gun Ship below the Ferry place between Boston and Charles Town. They have also a Battery on Copse [Copp's] Hill, on the Boston side, which much annoyed our Troops in the late Attack. Upon Roxbury Neck they are also deeply entrenched and strongly fortified. Their advanced Guard 'till last Saturday, occupied Brown's Houses, about a Mile from Roxbury Meeting House and twenty rods from their Lines: But at that time a party from General Thomas's Camp surprized the Guard, drove them in and burnt the Houses.

The Bulk of their Army commanded by General Howe, lays on Bunker's Hill, and the remainder on Roxbury neck, except the light Horse, and a few Men in the Town of Boston. On our side we have thrown up Intrenchments on Winter and Prospect Hills, the Enemy's Camp [on Bunker Hill] in full

view, at the distance of little more than a mile. Such intermediate points, as would admit a Landing, I have since my arrival taken care to strengthen down to Sewall's Farms where a strong Intrenchment has been thrown up. At Roxbury General Thomas has thrown up a Strong Work on the Hill, about two hundred Yards above the Meeting House, which with the Brokenness of the Ground and Rocks, have made the Pass very secure. The Troops raised in New Hampshire with a Regiment from Rhode Island occupy Winter Hill. A Part of those from Connecticut under General Putnam are on Prospect Hill. The Troops in this Town are entirely of the Massachusetts: The remainder of the Rhode Island Men, at Sewalls Farm. Two Regiments of Connecticut and nine of the Massachusetts are at Roxbury. The residue of the Army, to the Number of about seven hundred, are posted in several small Towns along the Coasts, to prevent the depredations of the Enemy: Upon the whole I think myself authorized to say, that considering the great extent of Line and the nature of the Ground, we are as well secured, as could be expected in so short a time and under the disadvantages we labour. These consist in a Want of Engineers to construct proper Works and direct the Men; a Want of Tools and a sufficient Number of Men to man the Works in case of an Attack. You will observe by the Proceedings of the Council of War, . . . that it is our unanimous Opinion to hold and defend these Works, as long as possible. The Discouragement it would give the Men and its contrary Effect on the Ministerial Troops thus to abandon our Incampment in their Face, formed with so much Labour and expence; added to the certain Destruction of a considerable and valuable extent of Country, and the uncertainty of finding a place in all respects so capable of making a stand are leading reasons for this Determination. At the same time we are very sensible of the Difficulties which attend the Defence of Lines of so great extent, and the Dangers which may ensue from such a Division of the Army. . . .

—Fitzpatrick, *Writings of Washington*, 3:320–22.

Gridley was often too ill to serve, but Washington was fortunate to have Baldwin, Putnam, and Knox to help supervise the works. In fact, the Commander in Chief reported that “most of the Works which have been thrown up for the Defence of our Several Incampments have been planned by a few of the Principal officers of this Army, assisted by Mr. Knox.”¹⁰ Because of the shortage of engineers, Maj. Gen. Charles Lee, an officer with wide experience in military affairs, worked “like ten post Horses” on the Boston defenses. “The undoing what we found done,” he wrote in disdain of the patriots’ earlier accomplishments, “gives us more trouble than doing what was left undone.”¹¹ Yet Lee believed the enemy would suffer “a considerable hole in their seven thousand men” should they attack.

Despite the disadvantages cited by Washington and Lee, the colonists persisted in pushing forward their works under the continuous threat of a British offensive and frequent cannonade. As described by Capt. John Chester, the rebel advance within close range of Bunker Hill, while indecisive, placed the British at a distinct disadvantage.

4. "WE EXPECTED . . . THE KING'S TROOPS WOULD HAVE ADVANCED ON US, BUT THEY DURST NOT"

A letter of John Chester.

Camp at Roxbury, Aug. 28, 1775

. . . Last Saturday night a Large Party of 1000 working men and 3000 more as a Covering party, under the Command of Major General Lee, advanced from Prospect Hill, or Plowed Hill (as they call it) full Half way to Bunker Hill. They workd most notably by all acct, and got under cover before morning. When the enemy discovered them, they began a Cannonade, which lasted all Day long. I suppose above three hundred shots and Bombs were sent. I have not been able to Learn that they Killed more than two of our people. . . . Two or three [were] wounded

Every Day since we have had more or less cannonading. The matter did not disturb us at Roxbury, so but that we went to Church, etc., as usual, and yet not a canon was fired or Bomb Broke, but what we Could see from our encampment. We expected every moment when the King's troops would have advanced on us, but they durst not. Their Light Horse were Paraded, with a Great Show, but nothing done as to coming out. We at Roxbury have been advancing this same time. When you was here we had a slight Gabion Battery across the Road, 100 Rods on this side the George tavern. That was our most advanced work then, and where the main Guard used to be and is still posted, and is out of sight of the enemy. Since that we have intrenched in their sight about 100 Rods South East of that, but Lately have advanced North East, and begun a Long intrenchment Just by the Burying Yard, and continued it along to the North Eastward, on a Rising Ground just out of the marsh, till it comes to the east end of Lamb's Dam, which is further advanced (I believe) than the George tavern. We have frequently recd shots while at work but not till we got under cover (for we always begin in the night) and so they have killed none of us. We keep a large piquet guard by Lambs Damm every Night not less usually than 400, and the main Guard hard by. . . .

—*Magazine of American
History*, 8:125.

Although dictated by circumstances—a severe powder shortage—Washington’s defensive posture proved controversial. Throughout the summer, criticism of the army’s inactivity mounted; and the anticipated departure of most of his troops when their enlistments expired at the end of the year led Washington, however reluctantly, to diverge from his basic strategy and propose an attack on Boston in September 1775. However, because it believed such a move to be inexpedient at the time, the commander’s council of war rejected the plan.¹²

Irritated by Washington’s reluctance to strike and at odds with the council’s decision, Lee confided to a sympathetic Dr. Benjamin Rush:

. . . We might have attack’d ’em long before this and with success, were our Troops differently constituted—but the fatal perswasion has taken deep root in the minds of the Americans from the highest to the lowest order that they are no match for the Regulars, but when cover’d by a wall or breast work. This notion is still further strengthen’d by the endless works We are throwing up—in short unless we can remove the idea (and it must be done by degrees) no spirited action can be ventur’d on without the greatest risk.¹³

But Lee lacked support and Washington and his advisors remained determined to engage the British only under clearly favorable conditions.

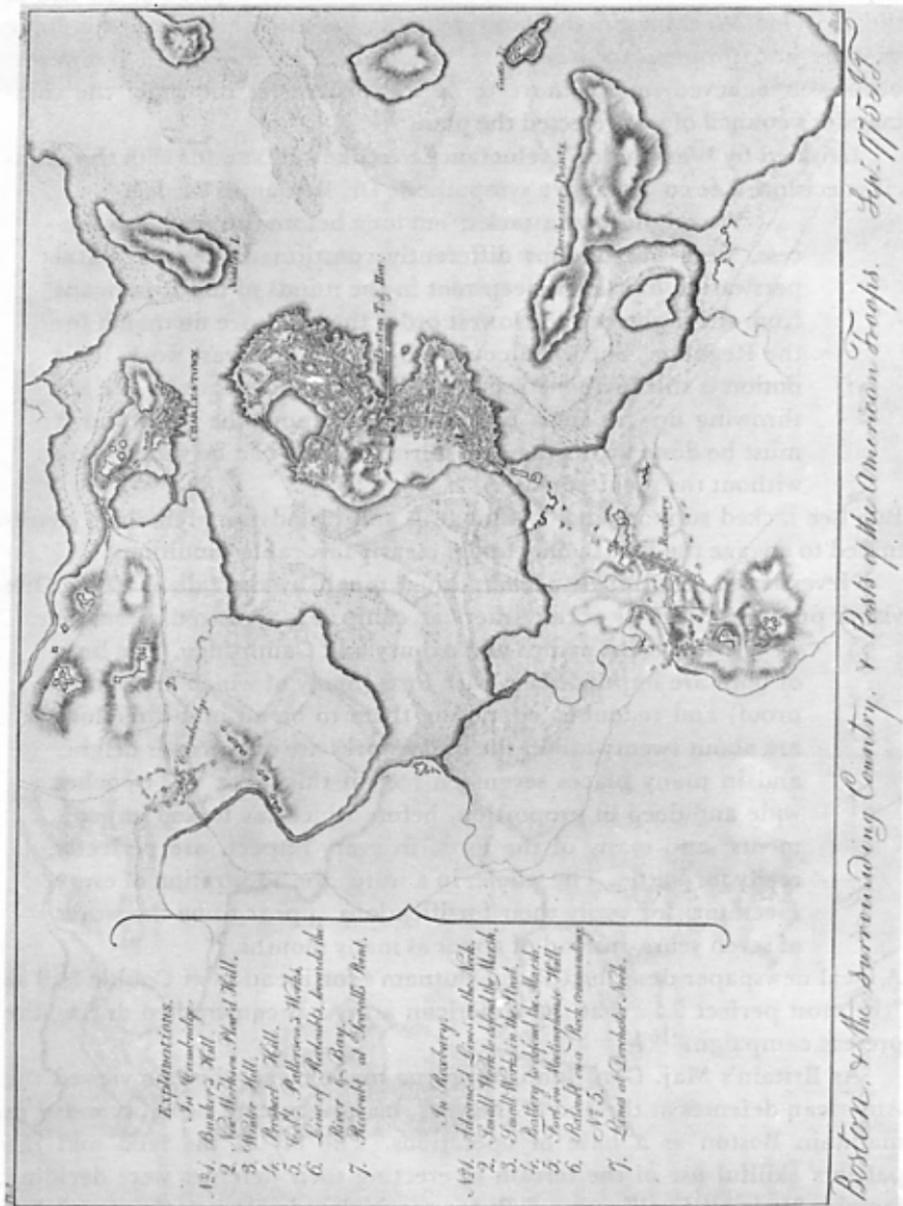
Nevertheless, the rebels accomplished much by the fall of 1775. One visitor provided this view of the American camp as it appeared in October:

. . . I viewed the camps at Roxbury and Cambridge. The lines of both are impregnable; with forts (many of which are bomb-proof) and redoubts, supposing them to be all in a direction, are about twenty miles; the breastworks are of a proper height, and in many places seventeen feet in thickness; the trenches wide and deep in proportion, before which lay forked impediments; and many of the forts, in every respect, are perfectly ready for battle. The whole, in a word, the admiration of every spectator; for verily their fortifications appear to be the works of seven years, instead of about as many months.¹⁴

A local newspaper described Rufus Putnam’s fortification at Cobble Hill as “the most perfect . . . that the American army has constructed during the present campaign.”¹⁵

As Britain’s Maj. Gen. John Burgoyne made clear when he viewed the American defenses at the end of the year, his government never intended to maintain Boston as a base of operations. The lay of the land and the patriots’ skillful use of the terrain in erecting their defenses were deciding factors. “It is all fortification,” Burgoyne declared. “Driven from one hill you will see the enemy retrenched upon the next and every step we move must be the slow step of a siege.”¹⁶

Throughout the winter of 1775–76, the American position was precarious: shortages of powder and weapons continued to be acute and enlist-



ments expired with little guarantee that replacements would be forthcoming. The British maintained their grip on Boston proper, Charlestown peninsula, and Boston Neck; the rebels surrounded them from the Mystic River to Roxbury. Only Dorchester Heights remained unfortified.

On 16 January 1776 Washington convinced his generals to end the stalemate with an attack, but detailed plans were delayed until the uncertainties of manpower and powder could be overcome. One thing was sure: the Americans needed to act before spring, when fresh British troops were expected.

A month later Washington proposed crossing the ice-covered Charles River on foot and taking the enemy by surprise. The plan was fraught with peril. His generals balked. They favored a move to draw the enemy out of Boston. Accordingly, the rebels resolved to occupy Dorchester Heights, believing that the British would not be able to restrain themselves from making an attack.

The following five documents detail the American effort from December 1775 through early March 1776. Baldwin concentrated on Lechmere Point (east Cambridge), a position ultimately boasting a bomb battery and two redoubts. Unknown to Washington, Howe regarded the works at Lechmere Point as a serious threat. As Baldwin noted, enemy gunfire and frozen ground were major obstacles.

5. THE PATRIOTS ENTRENCH ON LECHMERE POINT

From Jeduthan Baldwin's journal.

11. [December 1775]. Finish the Fortification on Cobble Hill.
12. Begun the causey at Leachmor Neck.
13. Began the Covered Way onto Leachmor hill. . . .
14. Workt on leachmor point. Went in the afternoon to Dotchester point to See the mashine to blow up Shipping, but as it was not finished, it was not put into the water. . . .
16. Stakt. out the Fort on Leachmor point.
17. Went to work on Leachmor point. It was Very Foggy in the fornoon, and when the Fog cleared away we had a Very havey fire from the Ships, and from Boston but thro' Divine goodness we Recd by little damage. Abel Woods was wounded in the Crotch or thigh. Workt all night, got our men covered. . . .
19. Went upon Leachmor point to work. A No. of Shot and Shells were thrown from Bunker Hill and from Boston at us and at Coble Hill, many of

BOSTON AREA FORTIFICATIONS. *John Trumbull drew this map of American positions surrounding Boston in September 1775.*

Trumbull, Autobiography

the Shot lodgd in our Brest work, and some of the Bumbs Brok high in the are and 2 near our works, but no Mischief done this Day.

20. Went upon Leachmor Point. We recd a No of 24 lb Shot from Boston into our breastwork and others Just went over all in a direct line hit the wall. Several Bumbs burst in the air, one was thrown from Bunker Hill into Cambg by Phineys Regt. 13 inch which did not bust. . . .

26. Went to Leachmor point. Laid a platform for the Great Morter. Workt at the bridge, the Day fair and extreem cold. Dind with Genl. Washington and Lady. . . .

28. Went to Leachmor point finished the Bridge and 2 platforms in ye loer Baston [bastion].

29. Laid one platform for a mortar in ye loer Baston and a platform for a cannon in ye upper Baston at Leachmor point. Cold.

30. Cut out two embrasures at Leachmor point. . . .

31. Lords Day. It Rained in the morning. No fateague this Day. Went to Meeting. Mr. Leonard Preacht from Exodus 111 and 10.

Jany 1, 1776. The Old Troops went of and left the lines bair in Some parts, cold.

2. Took a plan of the Fortification at leachmor point. Warm pleasant Day.

3. Went with 40 men to work at Leachmor in the forenoon, and to Water-town in ye afternoon, a warm pleasant Day. . . .

7. Lords Day, wort the Surceler [circular] Battery on Inmans point, and Cut out the obtuce ambrasure in the upper Bastion on Lechmor point, and throwd down the Stone wall there. Took a plan of Cobble Hill Fort. . . .

10. Had 5 teems carting Sodds, laid them in the new works, layd the Abertee [abatis] round the new works, cased the ambrasure in the uper Redout, . . . this Day Excessive cold and windy.

11. Workt at Lechmor point. Drawd in Abatree. Brok ground for the new work, finished laying out the work with Stones. It rained and Snowd in the Evning, and was a cold Day.

12. Workt at Lechmor pint. Had 100 Rifelmen to work with us 200 from Prospect Hill which made 300 in all, but found the Ground very hard frozen a foot thick in general. The oxen workt well this Day raw cold Chilley wind, Col. Miflin gave me a Quire of paper to Draw plans on. . . .

15. Workt at Lechmor point. It was a Raw cold Day and Snowd some. . . .Recd an order from Genl Putnam for wine, the order as follows, viz: . . . Deliver Col. Baldwin fifteen Gallons of Wine, which is necessary for health and comfort, he being every Day at the works in this Cold Season

19. Went to work at leachmor pint. The ground was frozen 22 inches Deep as hard as a rock, and in one night it frose in the trench 8 inches deep so that we pryed up cakes of frozen Earth 9 feet Long and 3 feet broad, it was fair but very cold this Day.

20. Workt. all Day at Lechmor point this Day clear and cold, could not dig Sods in the marsh it was so frozen.

21. . . . It was a cold Day went to Col. Gridleys in the Evning. Drank Coffey, and then went to Genl. Heaths, spent the remainder of the evning.

22. Workt. at Lechmor with a large party. Genl. Washington, Putnam and Gates, with several other Gentn came down to see the works. The ground was frozen in 2 feet deep and excessive hard, in some places, the men got thro the frost, and in other places they did not all, Day rold up an old wall into a line for a brestwork very cold and high tide this day. . . .

[February] 11. Lords Day. Workt at Lechmor pint. It was a cold Day, the ground frozen very hard 28 inches deep. We made Very large mines under the frozen Surface to get Earth to fill the parripets, the outsides of which was partly raised with Stone and part with timber. . . .

20. Workt. at Lechmor point. Dug round and undermind large pieces of frozen Earth which we rold out on Skids of Several Tons weight each, in digging for the Guard house, a fine pleasant Day.

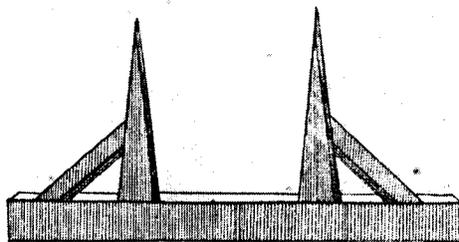
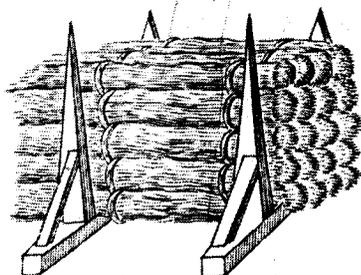
—Baldwin, *Revolutionary Journal*, pp. 17–27.

In his memoirs Rufus Putnam recalled deliberations over the choice between attacking the British directly and drawing them out of Boston by fortifying Dorchester Heights. Putnam himself preferred the latter course but questioned the feasibility of digging new entrenchments in ground frozen more than a foot below the surface. The Commander in Chief challenged his favorite engineer to solve the problem.

In fascinating detail, Putnam related how, under “Singular circumstances which I call providence,” he arrived at a solution—that of using chandeliers, wooden frames filled with fascines and other material, to raise walls without breaking ground. Until he read about chandeliers in a borrowed book, Putnam was unfamiliar with the technique.

A CHANDELIER. At Rufus Putnam's suggestion, the rebels used chandeliers successfully to defend Dorchester Heights in March 1776.

Deidier, *Le Parfait Ingénieur Français*



Chandeliers dont on se servoit autrefois pour faire des Epaulements

6. PUTNAM RECALLS THE DECISION TO FORTIFY DORCHESTER HEIGHTS

From Rufus Putnam's memoirs.

1776 January and February—During these months the mind of General Washington was deeply engaged on a plan of crossing on the Ice and attacking the British in Boston—or endeavor to draw them out by taking possession of Dorchester Neck.

Now with respect to taking possession of Dorchester Neck there were circumstances which fell within my knowledge, and Sphere of duty, which were so evidently marked by the hand of an overruling providence that I think proper to relate them.

As Soon as the Ice was thought sufficiently strong for the army to pass over (or perhaps rather before) a Council of general officers was convened on the Subject. What their particular opinions were I never knew, but the Brigadiers were directed to consult the Field officers of these Several Regiments, and they again to feel the temper of the Captains and subalterns.

While this was doing I was invited to dine at head Quarters, and while at dinner General Washington desired me to tarry after dinner—and when we were alone he entered into a free conversation on the Subject of Storming the town of Boston.

That it was much better to draw the enemy out to Dorchester, then to attack him in Boston no one doubted, for if we could maintain our selves on that point or Neck of Land, our command of the town and Harbour of Boston would be such as would probably compel them to Leave the place.

But the Cold weather which had made a Bridge of Ice for our passage into Boston, had also frozen the earth to a great depth, especially in the open country Such as was the hills on Dorchester Neck.—So that it was impossible to make a Lodgment there in the usual way, however, the General directed me to consider the subject and if I could think of any way in which it could be don, to make report to him immediately.

And now mark those *Singular circumstances* which I call providence.—I left head quarters in company with an other Gentleman, and in our way come by Genl. Heaths. I had no thoughts of calling untill I came against his door, and then I Sais, let us call on Genl. Heath, to which he agreed. I had no other motive but to pay my respects to the general. While there I cast my eye on a book which Lay on the table, Lettered on the back, *Mullers Field Engineer*.¹⁷ I immediately requested the General to lend it me. He denied me. I repeated my request. He again refused, and told me he never Lent his books. I then told him that he must recollect that he was one, who at Roxbury in a Measure compelled [me] to undertake a business which at the time I confessed I never had read a word about, and that

he must let me have the book. After some more excuses on his part, close pressing on my part, I obtained the Loan of it. I arrived at my quarters about dark. It was the custom for the overseers of the workmen to report to me every evening what progress had ben made during the day. When I arrived there were Some of them already there. I put my book in the Chest, and if I had time I did not think of Looking in it that night.

The next morning as Soon as oppertunity offered I took my book from the Chest, and looking over the contents I found the word, Chandilears. What is that thought I. It is Somthing I never heard of before, but no sooner did I turn the page where it was described with its use but I was ready to report a plan for making a Lodgment on Dorchester Neck—(infidels may Laugh if they please).

In a few minuts after I had for my Self ditermined Colo. Gridley (the Engineer who had conducted the work at Cambridge) with Colo. Knox of the Artillery, who had ben directed to consult with me on the subject arrived. They fell in with my plan. Our report was approved of by the Genl and preperations imediately Set on foot to cary it into effect and every thing being ready for the enterprise, the plan was put in execution Such were the circumstances which Led to the discovery of a plan which obliged the enemy to Leve Boston. Viz.—a Lodgment made of Chandeliars, Fasciens, etc.

—Buell, *Memoirs of Putnam*, pp.
56–58.

As plans to fortify Dorchester Heights took shape, Putnam made a triangulation of enemy and colonial positions in greater Boston. Given the proximity of enemy guns, he determined that a covered way was absolutely necessary; and, as marsh turf was unavailable, Putnam recommended that the covered way be made of timber supported by stone and earth. Without explanation he declared that the enemy was not then in a position to take Dorchester. The implication was clear: the time was ripe for the rebels to act.

7. "THE ENEMY CANNOT TAKE POSSESSION OF DORCHESTER HILL AT PRESENT"

Rufus Putnam to George Washington.

Roxbury, 11 February 1776

May it Please Your Excellency:

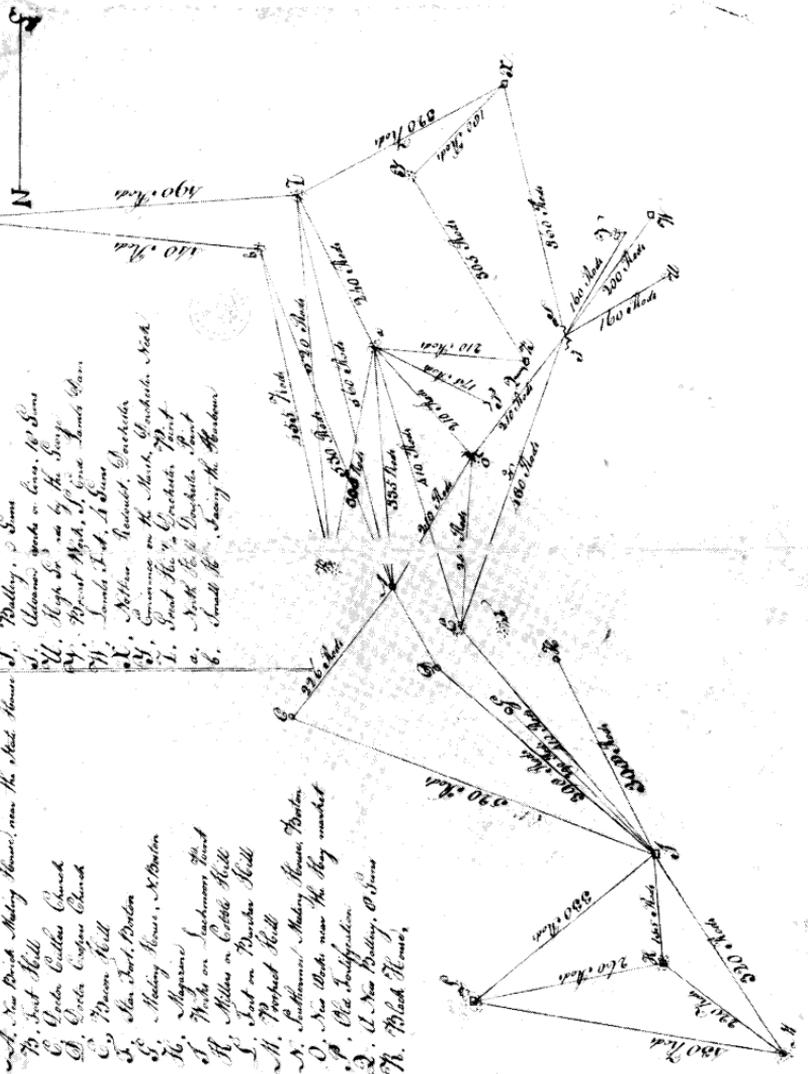
You have Inclos'd a Chart of some of the most Important Posts and Riseing ground in and near Boston, which is as Exact as I am able to make

A. West of corner of the most important 7th and Spring Green
 The American and Mechanical Unions, near and in
 Boston.

2979

- A. New Brick Making House, near the State House
- B. Foot Mill
- C. Watermill Church
- D. Watermill Church
- E. Watermill
- F. New Foot Boston
- G. Making House, N. Boston
- H. (Magazines)
- I. Works on Sachumans Land
- J. Mill on Cobble Hill
- K. Foot on Barber's Hill
- L. Foot on Barber's Hill
- M. Foot on Barber's Hill
- N. Southwestern Making House, Boston
- O. New Works near the City market
- P. Old Southwestern
- Q. U. New Building, O. Stone
- R. Black House,

- S. Building, O. Stone
- T. Unknown, near corner, W. Stone
- U. High St. near by the Spring
- V. Foot on Barber's Hill
- W. South St. near by the Spring
- X. Unknown, near corner, W. Stone
- Y. Corner on the North, W. Stone
- Z. South St. near by the Spring
- a. South St. near by the Spring
- b. South St. near by the Spring



from the little Leisure I have had to take Surveys of them, by this Draught it Appears that the Enemies works on the Neck is nearer the Causway going to Dorchester Point, than Bunker Hill is to the Cover'd way going on Leachmoors Point, therefore if a Cover'd way was Necessary in that case, it will be in this, should your Excellency think proper to order works thrown up on any part of the point. How this Cover'd way will be made is a Question. To procure upland or Marsh Turf at this Season is in my Opinion absolutely Impossible, and nothing short of Timber instead of Turf will Answer the purpose, the Method I have thot of is to side or Hew the Timber on two Sides only raising a single [Tier?] on the side of the Causeway. Raising a Parrapet of Stone and Earth next the Enemy. The Timber to be well Spliced together and if need be a post with a brace in about Fifty feet to support the Timber against the stone and Earth, I know Stone are bad in a Parrapet. But as they are easily Procur'd from the walls at Dorchester, and I think cannot be Driven through the Timber by any shot whatever, I would place them at the bottom and Cover the top with Earth which might be procur'd by opening a Pit for that purpose. About 200 Rods is Necessary to be made a Cover'd way which 80 Tons of Timber to Raise one Foot, and is in proportion to every foot, the Parrapet is High; I have been to the Swamp I mentioned to your Excellency the other Day. Find it between 12 and 13 Miles from the lines at Dorchester; there is near 100 Tons already got out besides a number of Mill Logs, the Carting from this place will be 12 [?] Ton, One Hundred Tons more may be had on these lands if the swamp Does not [break?] and no Doubt but Timber may be had in other Places, what your Excellency may think of so Costly a work I cannot tell, 'Tis the only method I know of, but wish a better way may be found out, I hope your Excellency will pardon my Officiousness in suggesting that I think this work may be Carried on with safety to the people Employ'd and to the Cause in general, as the Enemy cannot take Possesion of Dorchester Hill at present. Can we by any means have a Cover'd way in this frozen Season it will be of no small Consequence in taking Possesion of this Ground in a favorable Hour, the People who have been Employ'd by Mr. Davis in getting the Timber out of the Swamp will get no more unless your Excellency gives Orders for it. . . .

—Washington Papers, roll 35.

On 13 February 1776 Gridley and Knox, now a colonel and Gridley's successor as chief artillery officer, accompanied several American generals

PUTNAM'S TRIANGULATION OF BOSTON. Rufus Putnam executed this triangulation of American and British positions for General Washington in February 1776.

Washington Papers, Library of Congress

to Dorchester, where, according to Maj. Gen. Israel Putnam, Gridley "laid out works enough for our whole army for two years."¹⁸ Although Washington's intelligence reports indicated the British were about to move out of Boston, he went ahead with his plan: Boston would be bombarded from Lechmere Point and Cobble Hill near Cambridge while the Dorchester Heights were being fortified. If the British attacked as expected, a force would simultaneously move into Boston from Lechmere Point. As a further precaution, Washington was prepared to occupy Nook's Hill, the point on Dorchester Heights closest to Boston. From there the patriots could fire directly on vessels loading at the town's principal wharves. If the British had not been beaten already, the occupation of Nook's Hill would mean the end.

After weeks of preparation, bolstered by the procurement of powder and the arrival of artillery from Ticonderoga, the rebels began fortifying the Dorchester Heights on the night of 4 March 1776. They completed their task by daybreak. The Americans, Howe reportedly remarked afterward, had done more work in one night than his whole army would have done in six months.¹⁹ Archibald Robertson, one of Howe's engineers, called the colonists' effort "a most astonishing night's work."²⁰

Two eyewitness accounts follow. As noted by James Thacher, a surgeon's mate, barrels filled with sand and stone were intended to make the position appear more formidable and complement Putnam's chandeliers. If necessary, the rebels would roll the barrels downhill to halt the enemy's advance. His emotions fired by the "preparations for blood and slaughter," Thacher prayed "that victory be on the side of our suffering, bleeding, country."

8. "THE AMOUNT OF LABOR PERFORMED DURING THE NIGHT . . . IS ALMOST INCREDIBLE"

From James Thacher's journal.

4th [March 1776]—The object in view is now generally understood to be the occupying and fortifying of the advantageous heights of Dorchester. A detachment of our troops is ordered to march for this purpose this evening; and our regiment, with several others, has received orders to march at 4 o'clock in the morning, to relieve them. We are favored with a full bright moon, and the night is remarkably mild and pleasant; the preparations are immense; more than three hundred loaded carts are in motion. By the great exertions of General [Thomas] Mifflin, our Quarter Master General, the requisite number of teams has been procured. The covering party of eight hundred men advance in front. Then follow the carts with the entrenching tools; after which, the working party of twelve hundred, commanded by General Thomas, of Kingston. Next in the martial procession are a train of carts, loaded with fascines and hay, screwed into large bundles of seven or eight hundred weight. The whole procession moved

on in solemn silence, and with perfect order and regularity; while the continued roar of cannon serves to engage the attention and divert the enemy from the main object.

5th—At about four o'clock our regiment followed to the heights of Dorchester, as a relief party. On passing Dorchester Neck I observed a vast number of large bundles of screwed hay, arranged in a line next the enemy, to protect our troops from a raking fire, to which we should have been greatly exposed, while passing and repassing. The carts were still in motion with materials; some of them have made three or four trips. On the heights we found two forts in considerable forwardness, and sufficient for a defence against small arms and grape shot. The amount of labor performed during the night, considering the earth is frozen eighteen inches deep, is almost incredible. The enemy having discovered our works in the morning, commenced a tremendous cannonade from the forts in Boston, and from their shipping in the harbor. Cannon shot are continually rolling and rebounding over the hill; and it is astonishing to observe how little our soldiers are terrified by them. During the forenoon we were in momentary expectation of witnessing an awful scene; nothing less than the carnage of Breed's hill battle was expected. The royal troops are perceived to be in motion, as if embarking to pass the harbor, and land on Dorchester shore, to attack our works. The hills and elevations in this vicinity are covered with spectators to witness deeds of horror in the expected conflict. His Excellency General Washington is present, animating and encouraging the soldiers, and they in return manifest their joy, and express a warm desire for the approach of the enemy; each man knows his place, and is resolute to execute his duty. Our breast works are strengthened, and among the means of defence are a great number of barrels, filled with stones and sand, arranged in front of our works; which are to be put in motion and made to roll down the hill, to break the ranks and legs of the assailants as they advance. These are the preparations for blood and slaughter! Gracious God! if it be determined in thy Providence that thousands of our fellow creatures shall this day be slain, let thy wrath be appeased, and in mercy grant, that victory be on the side of our suffering, bleeding, country.

—Thacher, *Military Journal*,
pp. 46-47.

Rev. William Gordon, pastor of a Congregational church in Roxbury and Revolutionary chronicler, displayed a cool sense of detachment and a fine eye for detail as he gathered material for his projected history of the war.

9. "EVERY ONE KNEW HIS PLACE AND BUSINESS"

Rev. William Gordon to Samuel Wilson.

April 6, 1776

. . . All things being ready [March 4] as soon as the evening admitted of it, the undertaking went forward. The covering party consisting of 800 men led the way; then the carts with the entrenching tools; after that the main working body under Gen'l Thomas consisting of about 1200; a train of more than 300 carts loaded with fascines, presst hay, in bundles of seven or eight hundred, etc., closed the procession. Every one knew his place and business; the covering party when upon the ground divided, half went to the point next to Boston, the other to that next to the Castle [Castle William in Boston harbor]. All possible silence was observed. The wind lay so as to carry what noise could not be avoided, by driving the stakes and picking against the frozen ground (for the frost was still more than a foot thick, about a foot and a half) to carry, I say, what noise could not be avoided into the harbour between the town and the castle, so as not to be heard and regarded by such as had no suspicion of what we were after, especially as there was a continued cannonade on both sides. Many of the carts made three trips, some four.

Gen'l Thomas told me that he pulled out his watch and found that by ten o'clock at night, they had got two forts, one upon each hill, sufficient to defend them from small arms and grape shot. The men continued working with the utmost spirit, till relieved the Tuesday morning about three. The neighbouring militia had been called in for three days to guard against accidents, and were in by twelve at night, some before, in the evening. The night was remarkably mild, a finer for working could not have been taken out of the whole 365. It was hazy below so that our people could not be seen, tho' it was a bright moon light night above on the hills. . . .

—*Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings*, LX, 361–64.

As hoped, Howe planned an immediate offensive just as Gage had done when the rebels entrenched on Breed's Hill; but contrary winds delayed the attack long enough to allow the rebels to strengthen their works. These developments, coupled with Howe's troop and supply problems, made his position untenable. He reconsidered and chose instead to abandon Boston.

When the British departed on March 17, "the inhabitants discovered joy inexpressible."²¹ Though many buildings were damaged, their town was not burned. In a final gesture of defiance, however, the British blew up Castle William, the harbor stronghold.

Col. Charles Stuart, son of Lord Bute, a former prime minister, reported the background of the British decision to depart Boston.²²

10. THEIR POSTS WERE "MORE LIKE MAJICK THAN THE WORK OF HUMAN BEINGS"

Charles Stuart to Lord Bute.

Halifax, April 28, 1776

. . . We perceived two posts upon the highest hills of Dorchester peninsula, that appeared more like majick than the work of human beings. They were each of them near 200 ft. long on the side next the town, and seemed to be strong cases of packed hay about 10 ft. high with an abattis of vast thickness round both. We discovered near 6000 people, most of them at work; they opened embrasures before 9 oclock and about 2 oclock had made a ditch and connected the two hills by a breastwork.

We fired a few shots, but the position was too strong to be affected; the General therefore determined to attack it. A quantity of artillery and three regiments immediately embarked

. . . God knows whether it was a fortunate circumstance or not, but at any rate so high a wind arose that it was impossible for the boats to take to sea.

The next day the General assembled the field officers and acquainted us that the intended attack had failed through the inclemency of the weather, that he had consulted the engineers, who declared that the works had been so strengthened as to render any present attack very doubtful, and that should the enemy augment their works upon that peninsula from such a commanding height we should inevitably be drove from the town.

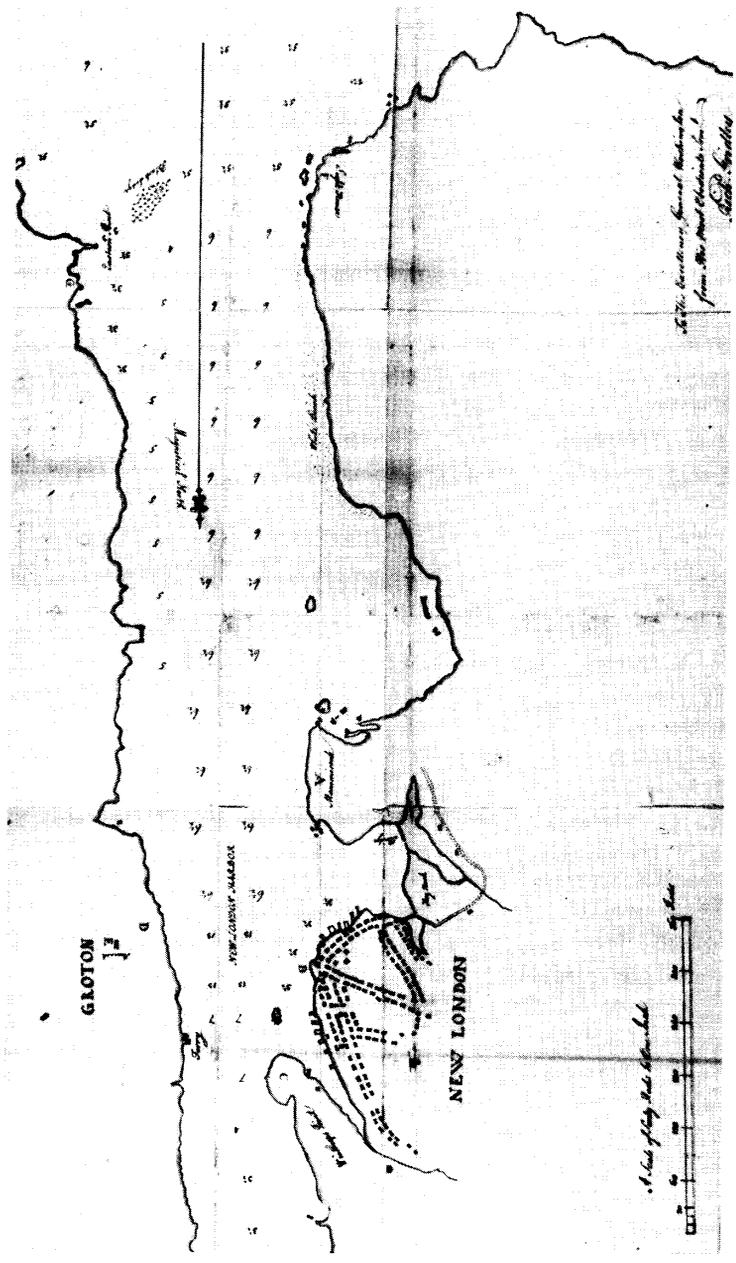
He also told us that there was no more than 6 weeks' provisions in the garrison, which obliged him to go to Halifax instead of to New York.

The principal citizens, on hearing that the town was to be evacuated, came to General Howe, and requested that the town might not be burnt; the General made answer that if the enemy molested him in his retreat he would certainly burn it; if not, he would leave the town standing.

This was made known by a flag of truce to the Rebels; in consequence of which we made our retreat unmolested. . . .

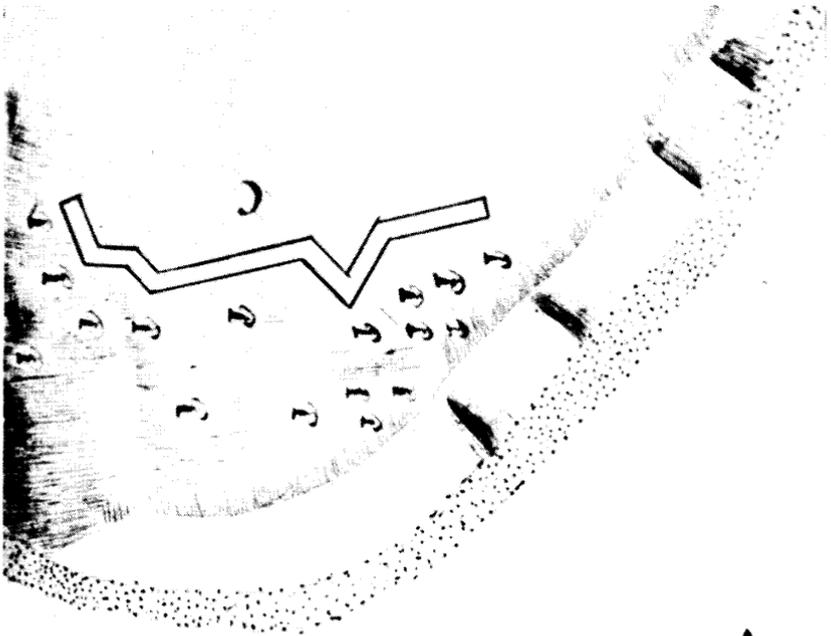
—Commager and Morris, *Spirit of 'Seventy-Six*, pp. 181–82.

British troops never again occupied Massachusetts, but fears that they might return generated immediate plans to strengthen fortifications in Boston harbor and in several coastal ports where the superior British navy might attempt raids. The enemy left behind well-executed works and artillery which although spiked was easily put back into service. Responsibility for overseeing the fortifications fell on Gridley, who remained as chief engineer in Massachusetts until 1781.



NEW LONDON, CONNECTICUT. Richard Gridley prepared the following maps of American works in the New London area for Washington in May 1776.

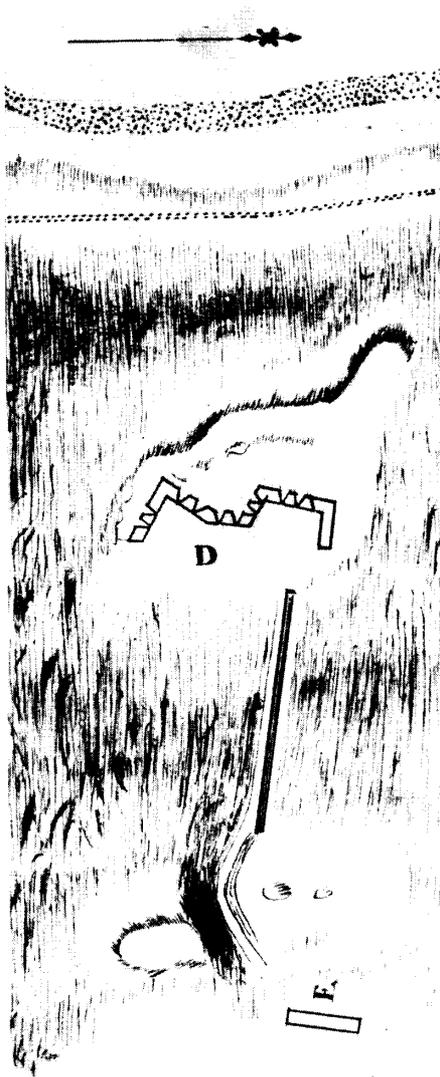
Record Group 360, National Archives



The Scale is 132 feet to One Inch



DETAIL OF ENTRENCHMENTS AT WINTHROP'S POINT



See sketch in 133, last to One Sheet

In this Battery Mounted on Springs of Brass

- 6 Eighteen Pounders*
- 5 Sixteen Pounders*
- 1 Nine Pounder*
- 35 Tons of Shot*
- 15 Tons of Powder*

DETAIL OF A BATTERY AT GROTON (D)

Gridley had problems. Upon hearing from Boston near the end of April that the defenses laid out earlier were not complete, Washington exploded:

Who am I to blame for this shameful Neglect, but you, sir, who was to have them executed? It is not an agreeable Task to be under the Necessity of putting any Gentn. in Mind of his Duty; but it is what I owe to the Public. I expect and desire, Sir, that you will exert yourself in compleating the Works with all possible Dispatch, and do not lay me under the disagreeable Necessity of writing to you again upon this subject.²³

Believing that Washington had been misinformed by townspeople ignorant of military works, the engineer quickly countered with his own account of the state of Boston's defenses and of surveys conducted along the coast north of Boston—surveys Washington had ordered only a week before he reprimanded Gridley. In Gridley's view, Gloucester was "a place of Great Consequence to keep possession of," and he accordingly proposed a new fort to secure it. With obvious agitation he dismissed the criticism as the work of men who were apt "to Prate of things they don't understand," and who in many cases possessed "a Malignant, Deceitfull disposition."

11. "I HAVE EXERTED EVERY NERVE TO THE UTMOST"

Richard Gridley to George Washington.

Boston, May 13, 1776

Sir:

I received your Excellencys Orders . . . and have agreeable thereto been to Cape Ann, and made a Critical Survey of the Same. The Plan that accompanys this, is a Survey made by Mr. Holland, which I Luckily met with, and have Examin'd in the Essential parts, and have added the Soundings and some Shoals which that plan had not and have been as Correct as the time woud permit; I have also sent plans of the Several Forts Erected at Glocester, which you'l please to Observe by the Red Letters refer'd to in the Plans; The Letter *H* which is at Mussel Point and is a Height well adapted for a Fort of Six Battering Cannon, which will greatly annoy any Ships coming into the Harbour, as they must come near it to avoid a Shoal, and the Battery being on such an Eminence, it cannot be hurt from the Ships Tops, and the Fort being only an Oblong Square Picketted, will be easily and gladly made by the Inhabitants, and can be easily Reinforc'd, or Retreat with Safety: In my opinion this Harbour is a place of Great Consequence to keep possession of—at present there is 250 Men to Guard it, but they are dispers'd from Squam Round the Cape to Glocester which is a Great Extent, and they cant Suddenly be collected together: They want Cannon Ammunition and men—Shoud there be an Alarm they cannot be

assisted from any place nearer than Ipswich which is twelve Miles distance: They Inform me four hundred of their men are Inlisted into the Army, and very few remain fit for Services—Manchester Eight Miles on this side Gloucester is without any Men or Fort, a Company of men and a Small Ridout (with three or four Cannon) made there at small Expencc woud be the Safety of that place, which place being cutt off, woud greatly hinder the Communication with Cape Ann, as from that place to Beverly, there is Water enough for the whole navy of England to Anchor there: I have mentioned to several members of the court here, the necessity (in my Opinion) of their furnishing Gloucester with Cannon and Men, as a Fleet is daily expected, and may do mischief before the Congress can have time to Act their pleasure from this Representation—Fort Hill and Dorchester Point Forts, Charles Town Fort and the Fort on Noddles Island [all in Boston] are now in a posture of Defence, with platforms Laid and Cannon Mounted on them, except Noddles Island which will soon be done: Three Cannon are Mounted on the Works at Castle William, and as soon as an Embrazure and platform can be finish'd, a cannon will be mounted; We shall be most Backward in the Laboratory way,²⁴ which I shall not be backward in hastning with all my Influence.—At Gloucester I received your Excellencys Letter of 28 April, which Surpriz'd me at first, but when I consider'd the Fears of the people in General in this Town, their Ignorance of military Works, their aptness to Prate of things they don't understand, and in many of them a Malignant, Deceitfull disposition my surprise ceas'd: I know I have Exerted every Nerve to the utmost in my power to Forward the Works; the Soldiers have Complained their Duty has been more Severe since the possession of Boston than before, for the whole were every day on Duty of Fatigue or Guard.—I have press'd the members of the Court and the Inhabitants of this Town to lend their assistance, and after some Consideration, have Effected their Aid: It is my strongest Inclination to forward every thing for the good of the Country Maugre the Insinuation of De-tractors—I woud have sent Plans of the Forts here, but have not time at Present, as I must set forward this day for New London. . . .

—Papers of the Continental
Congress, roll 95.

GRIDLEY PAY WARRANT. When Richard Gridley became Chief Engineer in 1775, Congress set his pay at \$60 per month. Subsequently, other engineer officers received the same pay, with assistant engineers receiving half that amount. As chief engineer for the Eastern Department at Boston, Gridley was still receiving the same pay when this warrant for three months' pay was issued in January 1777.

Artemus Ward Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society

To Ebenezer Hancock Esquire Paymaster Genl
of the Army of the United States —

Pay to Colonel Richard Gridley Fifty
four Pounds equal to One Hundred & Eighty
Dollars being pay for the Months of October
November & December 1776 as Chief Engineer
in the Service of the United States; & this shall
be your Sufficient Warrant

Given under my hand at Head
Quarters in Boston this Ninth
day of January Anno Domini 1777.

By His Excellency's
Command

Artemas Ward

Joseph Ward

Received the Above
Rich. Gridley

An account of lumber and nails provided by Congress for the Boston forts in the fall of 1776 reveals the scope of Gridley's effort to upgrade and maintain the town's defenses.

12. GRIDLEY'S ACCOUNT OF MATERIALS SUPPLIED TO THE BOSTON FORTS

Boston, November 1776

Fort-Hill, in Boston

4972 feet of Boards	2527 lbs. of Spikes and Nails
5420 feet of 2-inch Plank	Two buildings containing—
5175 feet of 4-inch Plank	12 thousand Shingles
2700 feet of Oak Plank	8206 feet of Boards
2700 feet of Pine Joist	900 feet of Timber
10,167 feet of Pine Timber	1200 feet of Joist
1675 feet of Oak Joist	8 thousand 10-penny Nails
672 feet of Oak Timber	12 thousand 4-penny Nails
2100 Pickets	½ thousand 20-penny Nails

No. 1. Fort at Dorchester Point

3454 feet of Oak Plank	800 feet of Oak Joist
2370 feet of Pine Timber	3070 feet of Boards
1600 Pickets	7½ thousand Shingles
220 lbs. of Spikes	7½ thousand 4-penny Nails
Two buildings containing—	5 thousand 10-penny Nails
650 feet of Timber	½ thousand 20-penny Nails

No. 2. Dorchester, second hill

3626 feet of Oak Plank	400 feet of Timber
1130 feet of Pine Timber	500 feet of Joist
200 feet of Pine Plank	2250 feet of Boards
1200 Pickets	5½ thousand Shingles
160 lbs. Spikes	5½ thousand 4-penny Nails
One building containing—	3 thousand 10-penny Nails

No. 3. Fort on Dorchester, southernmost hill

2626 feet of Oak Plank	600 feet of Joist
912 feet of Pine Timber	2320 feet of Boards
1100 Pickets	6 thousand Shingles
50 lbs. Spikes	6 thousand 4-penny Nails
Two buildings containing—	3 thousand 10-penny Nails
450 feet of Timber	½ thousand 20-penny Nails

Fort at Noddle's Island

3650 feet of Oak Plank	1395 feet of Pine Timber
1710 feet of Oak Timber	800 lbs. Spikes
2150 feet of Pine Plank	

Fort on Charlestown Hill

924 feet of Pine Timber	1342 feet of Boards
2592 feet of Oak Plank	3 thousand of Shingles
400 lbs. of Spikes	3 thousand 4-penny Nails
A building containing—	1½ thousand 10-penny Nails
200 feet of Joist	½ thousand 20-penny Nails
344 feet of Timber	

Fort on Governour's Island

288 feet of Oak Plank	23 thousand Shingles
156 feet of Pine Timber	23 thousand 4-penny Nails
1000 Pickets	60 feet of Timber
25 lbs. Spikes	750 feet of Boards
For the Blockhouse, viz:	Painting the Blockhouse

—Force, *American Archives*, 5th ser., 3:476–77.

Two years after the British evacuation, Gridley continued work on Boston's defenses in anticipation of an enemy attack. Convinced that the fortifications he had begun at Castle William and on Governor's Island should be finished speedily in order to close the lines around Boston, he begged for more men, equipment, and supplies. Noting that many Bostonians would be ready to blame him for every misfortune, he strongly defended his earlier labors: "I have hitherto done every thing in my power to forward the works . . . I could not do more . . . for want of Workmen."²⁵

When the British, now bolstered by a fleet superior to the French one, threatened Boston in September 1778, the Army's Chief Engineer, Brig. Gen. Louis Lebègue Duportail, conceived a plan to stop them. While attempting to prevent redcoats from leaving New York City, the Continentals, he said, should fortify the main route to Boston and cut off all detours and parallel routes. Duportail advised Washington to send him to Boston so that all necessary measures could be taken for the city's defense.²⁶

Washington followed Duportail's advice. On September 29 he ordered his Chief Engineer to Boston to examine the existing fortifications as well as those under construction and to "form a plan, from a view of the whole local situation of the place, . . . best calculated to give . . . the most effectual security." The Commander in Chief could not resist offering his own suggestions:

Without intention to lay any restraint which may contradict your own Judgments, I will barely hint my desire in general, that the works may not be to extensive with a view of embracing any considerable part of the bay, the heights of Dorchester which immediately command the town, will strike you as an object of the first attention, and the possession of them as indispensable; the occupying them, Roxbury heights and such ground as may cover the inner bason with works capable of obstinate defence will, together with the fortifications of the harbour secure the Town and French Squadron, till the arrival of this Army.²⁷

On October 6 Duportail surveyed the works; and on his advice—in Maj. Gen. William Heath's words—"fatigue parties were employed on the different works, and every thing put in the best posture of defence."²⁸